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SUBJECT Jack Anderson and Dale Van Atta

PHIL DONAHUE: Jack Anderson is with us. And he's here with his legman -- although you'd want to be called more than that. You're a much honored journalist. You've got all kinds of -- you've got Sigma -- Delta Chi awards. You are Dale Van Atta. And you are apparently the man in Jack's office most responsible for information which led to an astounding series of articles under the Anderson byline, which said that the President is going to invade Iran, and he's going to do it in October so that he'll get elected.

Let me share with -- you stand by your story?

DALE VAN ATTA: Yes.

DONAHUE: How do you know his motive? How do you know he wants to have it in October, so he'll get elected?

VAN ATTA: Well, I know his motive because Jack and I have talked to sources who are close to him. We've talked to military planners involved in this. And that's their assessment, that there is -- this is coloring his judgment, this November election; that he has asked them for good appraisals of this mission, to say it is going to be successful, when it might not be, when they might not feel they could get many of the hostages out, or that there might be repercussions that are awful.

DONAHUE: Let me share with our audience just a part of -- this, of course, is -- I'm excerpting from your -- how many were there, five articles?

JACK ANDERSON: Five.

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DONAHUE: Isn't it a little bit -- is it a little unbecoming that there's five, isn't there? I mean there are five days in the week, you know. I mean here you're saying, "The sky is falling. We're going to war. You're sons will be killed. More tomorrow." You know, it has a certain -- it has a certain promotion feature about it. You know what I mean?

ANDERSON: Not really. We just didn't have enough room to get it in. We don't have -- I have one column. I don't have several pages, like The New York Times. If I had been The New York Times, I would have run it in two pages.

DONAHUE: Incidentally, how many papers now? You're over 900 papers?

ANDERSON: It varies with the season. Because if it's the college season and a lot of college papers take it, we're over 1000. But we have a solid base of about 950.

DONAHUE: What's your estimate on the number of papers who refused to carry these pieces?

ANDERSON: I heard of three. There may have been a few more.

DONAHUE: Any big ones in that three?

ANDERSON: The Washington Post.

DONAHUE: Would not carry your pieces?

ANDERSON: Would not carry it.

DONAHUE: Really?

ANDERSON: And...

DONAHUE: The hard-hitting, aggressive, hang-the-cost of the investigation, let's-get-the-truth Washington Post won't carry this.

ANDERSON: They called. They did -- they called. They were friendly about it. They said that they did not dispute it, but they had been unable to confirm it. That doesn't surprise me. It took us about three months to nail it down. I wouldn't expect them to be able to do it with two telephone calls.

DONAHUE: But it has to be a source of discouragement for you that one of the nation's most prestigious newspapers refused to carry your pieces.

ANDERSON: No. They've refused other stories. Back

in 1971 I wrote that the CIA had hired Mafia killers to try to knock off Fidel Castro. They couldn't confirm that either.

DONAHUE: And they wouldn't carry that?

ANDERSON: No, they wouldn't carry that one either.

DONAHUE: You're going to stand on your story -- you're going to stand by that story. It proved to be true, didn't it?

ANDERSON: Yeah. It took them -- I think it took them about six years to confirm that one.

VAN ATTA: In a Senate committee, where it was very public.

DONAHUE: Yeah.

Now, this point has to be made, Mr. Anderson, that on this piece it looks like you're really soul-peeking here. I mean let me share with this audience a part of what you've said. This -- your lead -- let me just read the lead before you show that. Your lead on the first piece read as follows: "A startling top secret plan to invade Iran with powerful military force has been prepared for President Carter. The ostensible purpose is to rescue the hostages, but the operation would also exact military retribution." I'm not sure what that point is. In other words, you're saying we're going to punish Iran for taking our hostages. I think that's your point, is it?

ANDERSON: Yes. They wanted to inflict some military retribution for the humility [sic] they've caused us over the past year.

DONAHUE: Second paragraph: "This would create a crisis on the eve of the election. Political studies show that support for the incumbent President has always soared dramatically during a national crisis."

All right. You've already kind of introduced the political nature, as you suggest.

Here now -- here's your next line. Let's take a look at these, if we can, from Anderson's column: "The tentative invasion date has been set, suspiciously, for mid-October. Sources say the President has assessed the political consequences and has concluded the invasion would be popular with the electorate. This raises a disturbing question about Carter's motive," says Mr. Anderson. "The person he really wants to rescue," sources suspect, "is himself. They believe he's willing to risk war to save himself from almost certain defeat in November."

Now, hold it. Let's look at this. This -- is this the stuff on which journalism is based? "They believe"? Isn't that really between the President and his analysts? And is it really our business to be -- to be reporting on people's suspicion of the President's motives?

ANDERSON: Oh, absolutely. These are the people who are planning the military operation. They were worried about it. They didn't think that it would succeed. And they thought that the President's judgment had been distorted by his political ambitions. They were deeply concerned about it.

DONAHUE: You could have said that...

ANDERSON: They had already tried one rescue attempt. That was a fiasco. As a result of that fiasco, the hostages were scattered. The likelihood that they could be rescued under the present circumstances were pretty dim, pretty bleak. The chances were that if another rescue attempt was mounted, that more people would be killed than would be saved.

And we have across the border in Iran, within easy striking distance of Iran, 23 Soviet divisions. The Soviets have already declared that if we went in with military force, that they would intervene.

Well, this was enough to cause some deep concern on the part of the military planners. And, obviously, they had expressed their concern to the President, and he had overruled them, and he had said, "Let's go ahead with this plan." So they believed that his judgment was colored by his political ambitions.

DONAHUE: Mr. Van Atta.

VAN ATTA: Journalists have reported this before. If you remember, during the primaries the reporting was President Carter called a 7 A.M. conference to say that we may free the hostages soon on the morning of a critical primary. The political motives involved and behind the Iranian hostages have been recognized and reported all along. In fact, after the April rescue mission, Joseph Kraft wrote a couple columns in The Washington Post saying it was a political move.

DONAHUE: But that's after the fact. We also wonder whether Henry Kissinger's press conference, in which he said, "Peace is at hand" was not a political maneuver to insure the reelection of Richard Nixon. That's fair comment.

But what we have here is we have to accept your crystal ball. And I'm sure there were people in the White House who thought that FDR was -- you know, what was this crazy notion of invading Norman -- of landing on Normandy Beach, so that he'd

look tough and be -- isn't there always someone who will challenge the motives of the commander-in-chief? And how many wondered whether Harry Truman was dropping the bomb on Hiroshima because he wanted to look -- "Sources close to the President say he's going to drop the bomb because he wants to look tough to the American people."

ANDERSON: Well, not on the eve of an election. I think neither of those events occurred on the eve of an election, with a President who was, in this case, lower in the polls than any President had ever been in the history of polling. So you had a President in desperation, a President with overwhelming political ambitions.

And you had -- in any case, it's not my staying [sic] it. It's the people who were there, who were doing the planning, who were listening to him talk, who had been warning him of the repercussions and of the dangers.

DONAHUE: Yeah.

ANDERSON: These are the people who say that they feared, they desperately feared that his judgment had been distorted by his political ambition.

VAN ATTA: Phil, there is an historical precedent. The Gulf of Tonkin incident in August of 1964. The same things were said about that. And since that time has passed, it looks like it was a contrived incident. And it created the effect of losing, partially losing the election for Barry Goldwater. He started going down in the polls because he had been seen as a tough, militaristic type person; and here his opponent suddenly had given tough communiques too, and gotten us into the North Vietnam War.

DONAHUE: And only two senators voted against it.

VAN ATTA: Yes.

DONAHUE: Let's just -- one more paragraph from the Anderson pieces on this issue. This is you, Anderson-Van Atta, so to speak. What do you think of this? "Sources deeply involved in the planning fear Jimmy Carter's driving determination to get reelected has distorted his judgment."

Now, the point here is that these planners fear this. They don't know this; they're worried about it. So, let's -- let's -- you know, let's make the point that you have no evidence that there's any overt -- there is no overt evidence that Jimmy Carter wants to do this to get reelected. What we have here are people watching his body movements. "Some feel this strongly. Others admit it reluctantly. They describe the embattled Carter as extremely intense, coiled, relentlessly pushing toward his

objectives."

Jack, isn't this thin journalistic ice?

ANDERSON: No. As a matter of fact, it's not. It's, I think, absolutely a story that the electorate are entitled to know about. It's a story that came from the people who are the closest to the President.

Obviously, no one, perhaps not even Rosalynn, knows what goes on in his mind. But everyone, every journalist who is watching the President, every White House correspondent is speculating, from the sources around him, as to what the President is thinking, as to what he's doing.

DONAHUE: Sure. And you'll agree that that speculation could be wrong.

ANDERSON: And it's clearly speculation here. We are saying, "This is what the people who are working on the plan believe. It's a belief based upon their conversations with the President, upon the orders that he had given."

DONAHUE: All right.

ANDERSON: And I think it's entirely justified. The timing of the military operation, mid-October, certainly suggests that they were right in their judgment. The President could have waited until after the election, if he wanted to keep it out of politics. It would have been -- if it were a viable, legitimate military operation, it'd be just as good on November 6th as it would be two weeks before the election.

DONAHUE: The White House. Can we see this for -- "The suggestion that this or any other Administration would start a war for political benefit is grotesque and totally irresponsible. The allegation made by Jack Anderson is absolutely false." And we've skipped a paragraph. "Erroneous and totally irresponsible reports," said the White House, "such as the Anderson column, increase the danger to the American hostages in Iran, impede efforts to obtain their release peacefully, and jeopardize American interests in the area generally."

Now, what we have here is a denial that the Administration would start a war for political benefit. We couldn't expect anything else from the White House or any other person who would be accused of this kind of charge.

In my own background chats with the Pentagon, what you have said here in your lead, "A startling top secret plan to invade Iran with powerful military force," is denied. What we don't know is how they would have responded had you changed your lead

to read as follows -- this is my, just for the point I want to make. Your lead suggests D-Day here. You know, this suggests Normady Beach invasion. And the White House says, "Hold it. That's not true."

What is rather less clear is how they would have responded had your lead been as follows: "A startling top secret plan to use American military personnel again in a covert attempt to rescue the hostages has been prepared for President Carter."

ANDERSON: It was more than that, though.

DONAHUE: It was.

ANDERSON: It was more than that.

VAN ATTA: That would have been wrong.

ANDERSON: It would have been a false story.

VAN ATTA: Covert. It was very overt, extremely overt.

DONAHUE: Well, about covert, okay. I meant...

ANDERSON: It would have been an overt attempt...

DONAHUE: What would you call the first rescue attempt? That's covert, isn't it? I mean it was secret. Nobody...

ANDERSON: Well, it wasn't going to be secret very long, when they go storming...

DONAHUE: Well, let's not argue about semantics. Make your point.

VAN ATTA: No one can judge about the first rescue attempt. What you didn't know and what Jack has reported is that there were other stages in the plan that may have even included F-14 overflights and possibly bombings. Those were part of the plans. But it was botched at a very early level. So you don't know what happened in the first April plan.

DONAHUE: Well, but it's not unreasonable to assume that the Pentagon, in consultation with the White House and the Joint Chiefs, have, in fact, a number of military response alternatives or initiatives in order to save the hostages.

ANDERSON: Of course.

DONAHUE: Unknown is whether or if at all any of these contingency plans will be activated. That's what we don't know.

ANDERSON: Of course. We did not say that the plan was operational. We said the President had ordered it implemented. Now, there's a good deal of difference between a contingency plan on paper and a plan that the President has ordered implemented. This was one that he'd ordered implemented. He had placed a satellite in position. It had begun photographing the Iranian terrain.

DONAHUE: Okay. That doesn't mean he's going to invade anybody. That just means he's smart. We're going to take a look at things.

ANDERSON: It means he's preparing for one.

DONAHUE: Well, I don't know whether...

ANDERSON: What do you want to look at the desert for? You're thinking...

DONAHUE: Well, certainly if I were President, I'd want all the pictures of Iran I could get.

ANDERSON: Why?

DONAHUE: Because it would help me establish...

ANDERSON: Help you what?

DONAHUE: ...troop movements.

ANDERSON: Well, sure. That's in case we want to have a military operation. Then we...

DONAHUE: My point, Mr. Anderson, without being...

ANDERSON: Well, that was just one of many...

DONAHUE: It is not fair to conclude that therefore, because the President arranged to have a satellite fixed in the sky in order to take continuous photos of Iran, it does not entitle you to conclude that the President's going to invade Iran.

ANDERSON: But the difference is that he is making preparations, which is all we said. We said that he is preparing for it.

Now, what he did do is order these preparations to begin. What he did do was cross the -- well, any military operation is done in phases, in stages. And what he did was pass the first control point.

This was not an operational plan. We made that quite clear. We made it clear in all five of the columns.

VAN ATTA: That it wasn't irreversible.

ANDERSON: That he had merely passed the first control point. He had ordered the preparations to begin. At any time after that, he could have, with new information...

DONAHUE: Cancelled first wire.

ANDERSON: Cancelled it.

DONAHUE: I understand that.

ANDERSON: The first -- the first rescue attempt last April did not become operational till two weeks beforehand. And, obviously, they couldn't on two-weeks notice have prepared that operation. It was already prepared. The President had given the signal in February.

What we're reporting here is that he gave the same signal -- that he had given the same signal that in February he had given on the first rescue attempt.

DONAHUE: The wheels are turning, so to speak.

VAN ATTA: If we had been sitting here in February on your show, the same arguments would have been made, even if we had successfully described the entire thing. And it might have stopped that April rescue mission. The final decision was not made until April 11th. Then Carter said, "Go."

DONAHUE: But the grievance, I think, is not so much your suggesting that plans to effect a military operation in Iran that will hopefully result in the release of the hostages is not necessarily an unreasonable possibility. The problem comes with you stepping one -- going one step beyond that and playing psychiatrist and telling us that the President is fidgety and coiled, and wants to get elected, and nervous. It seems to me that that's an unfair liberty that you've taken.

ANDERSON: [Technical difficulties]...of the April military operation.

DONAHUE: After the fact.

ANDERSON: Well, after the fact or before the fact, this is -- this is his charge as to what the President's intent was, what his purpose was. And actually, most of the reporters in Washington would agree the raid was ordered by the President for political reasons.

DONAHUE: According to Joe Kraft...

ANDERSON: "Defense Secretary Harold Brown and the Joint Chiefs went along as good soldiers, without any serious assessment of the plan. Hence, the mounting of an operation so deficient in concept and detail, that we're lucky it aborted early. At every turn of the Iranian crisis, in big things and in small, in matters of life and of death, in military, diplomatic and economic affairs, Carter's actions have at all times been ruled by a single dominant consideration. That consideration is domestic political advantage."

We're not the only ones saying it.

DONAHUE: I still think, Mr. Anderson, there's a difference between -- there's a difference between that analysis, after the aborted attempt, and you're presuming to tell America what's motivating the President regarding possible future actions.

ANDERSON: I don't think there's any difference at all. He's saying that the President ordered a military operation that could have caused casualties. In fact, the plans called for the use of F-4s and bombing and other military operations He's saying he did it for political reasons.

DONAHUE: You claim also to have information that some 500 Air Force personnel have been moved to Egypt, along with a contin -- apparently, a significant number of Phantoms, F-4s, just in case, huh?

ANDERSON: Yes. And that's just a small part of it.

DONAHUE: All right. That's believable.

VAN ATTA: The same thing was done last December. Our contingents were moved to an Egyptian air base, a staging area.

DONAHUE: All right. Just to muddy the water a bit here, or at least to turn the wheels. This is just a terribly grim if, but it's something I think all of us have to -- suppose one of the hostages, just suppose one of the hostages -- please, God, don't let this happen -- is executed. Now, think of the emotional response of 220 million Americans. It does appear that -- again, this is my crystal ball, subject to error, as it is. It appears that the President -- the pressure on the President to respond to that would be so enormous that he would have to push the kind of button that you claim he's preparing for in these series of articles. So the fact that we are ready with differing mil -- with various military possibilities is very believable. And, in fact, my guess is that most American taxpayers expect the President and the Pentagon to prepare for these possibilities.

ANDERSON: What's the excitement, then?

11

DONAHUE: The excitement is your presuming to be an analyst, and accepting the words of various people who fear that President Carter is doing this for political advantage. I mean if somebody came...

ANDERSON: Well now, if the people who are doing the planning, the people who are responsible at the military level for the lives of our soldiers, if they believe that such an operation is going to cost more lives than it could possibly save, if they believe that it could trigger war...

DONAHUE: That's a different point.

ANDERSON: ...with the Soviet Union...

DONAHUE: That's a different point.

ANDERSON: No, it's exactly the same point. If they believe that...

DONAHUE: They're entitled to that belief.

ANDERSON: And they do. You don't think that the American people are entitled to know that these people fear that?

DONAHUE: Yes, I do. I definitely do. I definitely do. What I guess I...

ANDERSON: That's what they fear.

DONAHUE: Let's try and draw this one out. "Sources close to Jack Anderson" -- this is my report. This is my report -- "which I cannot identify," because I am a good reporter and I don't want to compromise my sources, "told me that Jack Anderson and his assistant, Dale Van Atta, used this material in a five-part series in order to enhance the circulation of their column."

[Applause]

DONAHUE: What's the difference? You know. And how do I know how good -- how do I know whether your sources like you? Maybe they're upset because you didn't give them a pay raise. Maybe they're upset because they weren't called to the last meeting that you had. There's all kinds of reasons for a per -- I can ascribe false motives to anybody. That's always what we do to people with whom we disagree.

ANDERSON: Well, these are -- these are sources who are deeply concerned about the possibility of war with Russia. They have 23 divisions across the border in Iran. This is more than we have in our entire armed forces.

DONAHUE: Yeah, but that...

ANDERSON: There is no way that we could counter the 23 divisions, except with nuclear weapons. The President is aware of that. And because he's aware of that, he's already ordered a study of the use of nuclear weapons to stop the 23 divisions.

We're talking about something pretty bleak. We're talking about something quite alarming, something absolutely frightening. And the people around the President are concerned about it. The people involved in the military operations are concerned about it. They're talking to us.

Now, I suggest Phil, that we have a track record that deserves serious consideration of this story.

DONAHUE: You are one of the most honored and respected journalists in the world.

ANDERSON: We don't make these things up. And when we say that the military planners are worried about this and are fearful that the President's judgment has been distorted, this is something the American people are entitled to know about. They do fear this. But these are military people and he's their commander-in-chief. And they cannot call press conferences. They're forbidden from doing that. They would be sent to jail, actually, if they talked about top secret documents in a public meeting.

DONAHUE: You're the man who talked to these concerned military...

ANDERSON: We have -- there were three of us who talked to them. But he's the one who saw the documents. And I wanted you to know that...

DONAHUE: Right.

I assume that there are people close to the President who do not ascribe this politically selfish motive to his military preparation. And I guess I wonder whether you had a chance to talk with them, and why we don't have the benefit of their comments in these stories.

VAN ATTA: There are some people -- and we did have them in there -- there are some people who, after thought, said reluctantly, "Yes, we think this is so." And you're talking about which motive is the most: to rescue the hostage, or whatever.

Let me just enter a hard piece of evidence here. The DIA was asked some time ago, at the beginning of this operation.

DONAHUE: The Defense Intelligence Agency.

VAN ATTA: The Defense Intelligence Agency was asked to analyze what would be the Soviet reaction if we went into Iran, seized and held territory. They were asked to do that. And they came back, the DIA analysts, the lower analysts, gave a worst-case scenario that we would risk a nuclear war. We might risk a nuclear confrontation with the Russians.

By the time that got up through the channels of intelligence and through the National Security Council, who knew what the President wanted, it was watered down to quite an extent. Now the President is saying in background briefings this is what has convinced him not to invade Iran, that it looked like it might start some kind of nuclear confrontation.

DONAHUE: Right.

And just one more point, that this is information which is in your columns. After...

ANDERSON: The President -- the White House -- Zbigniew Brzezinski, specifically -- has confirmed this DIA report.

DONAHUE: During the first rescue attempt, when our planes covertly went -- crossed into Iranian airspace, you claim to have developed proof, or information that the Soviets picked it up on radar, whatever, their own black boxes, and, in effect, said, "Hey, we've got Americans coming into Iran," via radio or code or KGB, whatever it was. And they told Carter, "We think the Soviets know."

Now, listen to this. This is -- Carter picks up the hotline, calls the Kremlin and says, "Listen, guys. We're trying to get the hostages. So leave us alone here, will you?" I'm sure he said it in probably more -- but now, the point here is this: that as long as 52 Americans are being held hostage in Iran, we really are on the brink of anything.

VAN ATTA: And that's the point. It was a very serious consideration to run these columns. There's no way we ever hoped to improve circulation. We thought that most of the public might be against us unless we clearly spelled out why we were doing it, that you're talking about a serious thing. You don't just want to retaliate because we have 53 Americans in Iran. You don't want to precipitate World War III. You don't want to alienate the entire Arab World. You have to consider those things. And then you look at what the President is considering. He should be considering the same things.

ANDERSON: How do you feel about all this? We hope you'll join us.

14

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WOMAN: I just wanted to ask Jack Anderson if he had any comments from the relatives of the hostages saying, "How could you do this? You ruined our chances," if they think it was going to work.

ANDERSON: I think it was probably the other way around. I haven't seen the letter, but George Hansen, who was over in Iran, told me that he had gotten a letter and he was going to send it to me, from one of the hostages thanking me.

Dick Gregory, who just got back from Iran, said that the stories probably saved the hostages' lives.

I would like to think that that's true, but there's no way of being sure.

WOMAN: Just thinking about being in line with the responsibility of reporting something like this. I'm wondering how you would feel if an operation was really successful, and your report had perhaps jeopardized that. Then how would you feel about that?

ANDERSON: I'd feel very badly. And I normally do not write about military operations in advance. But there have been times when I have felt that it was necessary. The Gulf of Tonkin incident, for example. I knew that it had been contrived. I knew because I had access to the secret documents. And I reported that it had been contrived. And if the country had paid more attention to that and less attention to Lyndon Johnson, we might have avoided the Vietnam War, which cost us 60,000 American lives, \$155 billion.

WOMAN: I believe, as Phil does, that the President must have many, many plans ready to implement at certain different times. And I would like to know, don't you feel that there's ethics involved here for you, as reporters?

DONAHUE: Like, for example.

WOMAN: If he knew a definite date, would he actually tell the people? It's so delicate.

DONAHUE: Let me just -- The New York Times knew about the Bay of Pigs invasion. And although, apparently, a watered-down, no-details story was published by The Times -- I don't think on page one -- prior to the invasion, they, for security reasons, withheld, honorable and patriotic Americans that they were, revealing this plan. Two weeks after the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy is supposed to have said to Turner Catledge -- is this right? -- from The New York Times, "I wish you guys had reported

it. We might have avoided this fiasco?"

WOMAN: But he felt that that was his error. But now we're going ahead. If they make a definite date, they're going ahead thinking they're right, not thinking that they might...

DONAHUE: That's what Kennedy did with the Bay of Pigs.

WOMAN: But the President can't make decisions on the fact that Kennedy made a mistake in his judgment. He has to go with his advisers, his judgment.

DONAHUE: And if it comes to deciding what's right, you'll stick with the President rather than the press?

WOMAN: Definitely. I think the President has the better military advisers, the better men around him.

ANDERSON: Well, that's the point. He's not paying any attention to his military advisers. That's why we wrote the story.

See, there's nothing in the election process that transforms a peanut farmer into a military expert. And in this...

[Applause]

ANDERSON: In this particular case, the military advisers have warned him not to do this.

DONAHUE: Which military advisers, and how many, and do we have a vote here, or are these two or three dissidents?

ANDERSON: Well, the people who do the planning, the people that we talked to are the people, in fact, that the Joint Chiefs themselves consult.

In other words, I don't claim to be competent to make those kind of judgments. Now, I've been at the ringside for 32 years. I've been talking to military experts for 32 years. Maybe I have some competence in this area. But I wouldn't trust my competence. I wouldn't say that a newsman is qualified to make these decisions. But the people we talk to are qualified. These are the people the Joint Chiefs themselves consult.

DONAHUE: Would you give us an idea how many sources you have?

ANDERSON: We have a number of sources. And from the sources we talked to, we know how the others felt.

DONAHUE: Two?

ANDERSON: Do you want to add to that?

DONAHUE: Three. Aren't we entitled to know how many people you talked to on this story?

VAN ATTA: At least 50. If you're talking about confirming...

DONAHUE: How many, though, expressed concern about the President's selfish political motives?

VAN ATTA: All of the sources that I talked to.

DONAHUE: All 50?

VAN ATTA: All 50. Now, what you're talking about...

DONAHUE: All 50 military people, covert...

VAN ATTA: I'm not saying that all 50 were military people. You were asking how many sources on this story.

DONAHUE: Well, I'm talk -- I guess I want to know how many -- see, here's what you're...

VAN ATTA: There was a very...

DONAHUE: ...you give to us: A whole bunch of folks from the Pentagon go over to Jack Anderson's office and close the door and look around and say, "Listen, Jack. The President is really going..."

[Laughter]

DONAHUE: I don't -- I think that -- I...

ANDERSON: Well, let me clear it up for you, then. Let me clear it up for you, then. And the only way I can do that is to take just a few minutes to tell you how we operate.

I discovered some 32 years ago that other reporters covered the news. We try to uncover it. They deal with newsmakers, which is the logical thing for them to do, the people who make the news. But the people who make the news are the politicians. The people who make the news are the people we elect and the people that the elected people appoint. There are about 1200 of them that a President brings in.

Now, if the President happens to come from Georgia, they have to ask the professionals, the career people even for directions to the bathroom. They have to depend upon the career people. But all of the other reporters, or most of them, at

at least, depend upon these newsmakers.

Well, I've discovered, 32 years ago, that politicians can't be trusted. And so I decided that I had to get my information from the same people who give their end -- who inform the President. So, what I've done for 32 years has been to develop contacts at the career level, at the professional level. Otherwise, you have to rely upon Jody Powell. Now, in 3 1/2 years as Press Secretary, Jody Powell has not yet made one single unfavorable statement about Jimmy Carter. I submit that makes him an unreliable source.

So, we deal with the people. We intercept the information at the level between the President and the career people, the professionals who supply him with the information.

So, these aren't people who wander into our office. These people that we have developed over 32 years, people at the career level, people at the professional level, people who know what's going on, who know what the real policy is.

DONAHUE: The point should be made that these are the same people who brought us the Vietnam War.

ANDERSON: No, Lyndon Johnson did that. And Lyndon Johnson did it because he overruled some of the military advice. Now, he got conflicting military advice. I'll grant you that.

DONAHUE: Okay. But you're not going to absolve the military planners of Vietnam War responsibility.

ANDERSON: No, I'm not.

DONAHUE: I've got to break here.

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MAN: I would like to address Mr. Anderson. And I say that it's appalled [sic] that we have to pick exactly what he says as being honest truth, and there's no way that we can actually look at anybody else and say, "Well, you're wrong," or not. Because Mr. Anderson is a type of a man who have the public in front of him at any time he wants to. He can say anything he wants. And for one, I can't believe half of what half of the newspapers say.

DONAHUE: But let's give him his due here. Here's a man who was significantly responsible for undercovering [sic] scandal in the office of Senator Thomas Dodd. He called the India-Pakistan favoritism on the part of the State Department, when they were saying one thing and meant another. He was very much a part of the Watergate investigation. He acknowledges he

blew the Eagleton story. But, you know, 1 for 112 ain't a bad average.

MAN: Well, 1 for 112, you might say. But he's got the resources. He could say anything he wants, whether it's proper or not. I don't feel that something of this magnitude, that the Pentagon would come in or some reliable sources would come in, as he has put down, and said, "Well, this is what I feel." Whether it's right or wrong, now it's in the public's eye.

ANDERSON: Well, I would just say that you're entitled to believe whoever you wish. And I certainly think that you ought to consider the White House statement. If you want to believe them, certainly you're welcome to do that.

I have nothing to cite but my record. Over the years, I've wrote story after story. Many of them have been denied. The Mafia-CIA plot against Castro was denied.

DONAHUE: Hoover. Hoover.

ANDERSON: It was confirmed seven years later.

DONAHUE: Hoover and the FBI. You were quite a...

ANDERSON: I reported that in 1970, and the basic facts were confirmed three years later. I told about the Koreagate scandal in 1974, named Tongsun Park, some of the congressmen that he was lobbying. That was confirmed two years later.

It takes, sometimes, a long time to confirm the stories we write about, for the reasons I told you a few minutes ago, because we're dealing at a different level than most of the other reporters are.

DONAHUE: But the point here is -- well, all right.

MAN: The point is that we have a record...

DONAHUE: How do we confirm this? We're never going to know President Carter's political motives.

ANDERSON: The point is that we have a record.

DONAHUE: If he had one.

ANDERSON: We have a record. And nobody knows what his motive is. I've made that point. All I'm saying is that the military planners believe that because of the October D-Day, and because of other things that he had said and the way he had acted, that his motives were political.

WOMAN: Mr. Anderson, I'm inclined to believe you. And if that's true, what is the bottom line? What can be done?

ANDERSON: Well, I wrote this story...

DONAHUE: Let me give you a chance to answer that. I promise I'll do that. I'm sorry, we're behind.

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DONAHUE: This woman thinks you may be right. So now what?

ANDERSON: Well, the reason we wrote the story was to stop it, because the people who were planning it thought it would be a disaster. We did the same thing on the Tongsun -- on the Bay of Tonkin affair. We did the same thing on the India-Pakistan affair, when we had a nuclear carrier task force heading into the battle zone, and the Russians saying that if they intervened in the India-Pakistan affair, that the Soviets would then intervene. We have written stories in the past, when the people are really fearful.

DONAHUE: Isn't there something messianic about your motives, though? You want to stop it. You know, who appointed you to make decisions like that? And...

ANDERSON: Well, that's in the Constitution, Phil.

DONAHUE: Well, okay. I'm not questioning...

ANDERSON: The press...

DONAHUE: I'm not questioning your ability or your freedom to write this. There's a certain moralism that goes with this, and almost a kind of superiority...

ANDERSON: When the people who are responsible for the lives of these commandos, the lives of our military forces are concerned, they have to turn somewhere. They may turn to a congressman, they may turn to someone in the press.

VAN ATTA: Phil, let me clear up a misimpression. There were White House sources on this. We're not just talking to military people. In fact, one of the first tip-offs -- and this is the kind of thing that happens in journalism -- is a person on the National Security Council confided in someone that in October this Administration would instigate an international crisis. And that was one of the first tip-offs that I had. And I followed through on some of that and did get to the White House level, and talked to some people who admittedly were more reluctant than military people, but it was there.

ANDERSON: And you have White House denials. But may I tell you, this man has seen the papers, he has seen the secret documents. And who is he? He has won a half-dozen journalism prizes. He's been nominated three times for the Pulitzer Prize.

Now, do you really believe Jody Powell above Dave Van Atta?

DONAHUE: That's not the question.

VAN ATTA: No. The point is, he lied before the April rescue...

ANDERSON: Of course it is. It's their view -- it's their statement against his.

DONAHUE: Let's try and separate it. Most Americans, I think, would believe you, that you've seen classified documents which detail possible military alternatives in Iran. That's not...

VAN ATTA: Not possible. Tentatively approved.

DONAHUE: Tentatively...

VAN ATTA: Moving ahead...

DONAHUE: With a date of October?

ANDERSON: With a date of October. That's what the documents showed.

VAN ATTA: But this clearly provided for some pretext. It was acknowledged by the planners that there would need to be a pretext. Carter has already secretly...

DONAHUE: A pretext. You mean a reason.

VAN ATTA: Carter has already secretly told the Iranians, according to a Christian Science Monitor story last June, that we would react militarily if they put one hostage on trial. These kinds of things.

WOMAN: You spoke earlier about the Washington Post refusing to print your article. I got the impression that you took it very lightly. Now, how do you really feel about this?

DONAHUE: How do you think he ought to feel?

WOMAN: Do you think they were arrogant in refusing to...

ANDERSON: I feel outraged by it. Because I think that after all the stories that I've written that they couldn't confirm,

that they ought to take my word for it on this one. I feel outraged because they went ahead with the Watergate investigation, in spite of the fact that to this day Ben Bradlee of The Washington Post doesn't know who Deep Throat was. So he was relying on some mysterious figure in a darkened garage at midnight, someone he doesn't even know. And I'm relying on Dale Van Atta, who saw the documents. And I'm outraged that they would not take Dale Van Atta's word and my word over some mysterious figure who told them about Watergate in a darkened garage.

VAN ATTA: And still printed much of the story, anyway. They didn't run the columns, but they ran news stories saying what most of the story said.

DONAHUE: And we'll be back in just a moment.

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DONAHUE: I have a book here. It's a paperback, "Confessions of a Muckraker." It's the story -- some of the stories that Jack Anderson has -- and while we're debating this, and who's right and who's wrong, and should The Washington Post have printed his articles, etcetera, he does have a rather -- rather attractive reputation to present to us. So we're not -- this doesn't make you right, but you are also the protege of one Drew Pearson, who back in the '50s, when nobody else in the press would dare challenge the powerful Joe McCarthy, he did, and even got socked for it, didn't he?

ANDERSON: Yes, he did.

VAN ATTA: And Nixon pulled McCarthy off.

ANDERSON: He was about two years ahead of Edgar -- of Ed Murrow. And Ed Murrow...

DONAHUE: And did Joe McCarthy throw the punch at Anderson -- at Pearson?

ANDERSON: As a matter of fact, he did, both figuratively and literally.

DONAHUE: He literally punched him. Okay. So, for what it's worth.

Yes, ma'am.

WOMAN: I just don't understand why we didn't go right in and get the hostages right away, instead of waiting all this time. This is ridiculous.

[Applause]

WOMAN: I wouldn't want to be there -- I've thought about this. I wouldn't want to be there, you know, and...

DONAHUE: How would you go in and get them? How would you go in and get them?

WOMAN: Any way you can get them, Honey.

DONAHUE: Well, like, Honey, you tell me.

WOMAN: I don't care if you have to go in and use force to get 'em.

DONAHUE: All right. Now, what do we do about the 200 Americans who are living in Iran? What happens when they capture them?

WOMAN: Well, why -- bring 'em back with 'em.

DONAHUE: Okay. We go in and get them, too?

WOMAN: Get everybody. I don't understand. I mean I just wouldn't want to be an American in any other country, and depending on my country to save me, and then be there a year.

DONAHUE: You really think -- you want the President to do something. Is that it?

WOMAN: Not just -- yeah. He should. Don't you think he should? After this long -- now he's already botched things up. He screwed up in April, you know? Yeah. And I think now...

[Applause]

WOMAN: You know, he's blown his chances.

ANDERSON: Well, you know, you're not that wrong. As a matter of fact, there are a number of professionals who thought that that's exactly what he should have done. But at the time -- you see, they had invaded our sovereign soil. The American Embassy is part of our sovereign soil. And the advice was, "Yes, you must react. If you don't, then our embassies around the world won't be safe."

DONAHUE: What advice was -- what, specifically, was the advice?

ANDERSON: That we had to retaliate, that we had to react.

DONAHUE: How? How do we react?

VAN ATTA: The Israelis gave a plan within several days, offered a plan. They have very -- they have the best contacts in Iran. They always have. We depend on Mossad.

DONAHUE: Are you saying that, somehow, in a military sense, we'd be more likely to rescue the hostages 24 hours after the takeover than 24 days?

ANDERSON: Absolutely.

VAN ATTA: Like the Mayaguez. You react quickly.

ANDERSON: By reacting quickly, you could've avoided the hardening of the situation. We would have moved in...

[Applause]

DONAHUE: And are you telling us that -- and we would have rescued all 53 hostages?

ANDERSON: We would have retaliated. We would have retaliated in such a way that we would have -- whatever happened to the 53 hostages, no country would have ever invaded or burned or sacked one of our embassies again.

[Applause]

DONAHUE: I sense from you a disappointment that we weren't more hard-line at the outset.

ANDERSON: We have never before in our history permitted another nation to invade our sovereign soil and not react with anything other than to turn off the Christmas tree lights.

DONAHUE: Okay. But that -- see, that kind of -- that's got a -- that's got a John Wayne sound to it, Mr. Anderson.

ANDERSON: On the contrary.

DONAHUE: And is that becoming a journalist? And there are many people in the Pentagon who would say, "As a military strategist, you make a good newspaper reporter."

ANDERSON: On the contrary. Now that the situation has hardened, now that the Soviets have their divisions in place, now that they have warned that any military retribution on our part will be countered by them, it's an entirely different situation.

They would have understood if we had reacted immediately. The whole world would have understood. They would have figured that we were justified. But when you -- when you use diplomacy for most of a year, and then change your plan, you've

got a different situation.

WOMAN: I don't understand, as far as us getting involved in this whole thing. I mean I believe what you say. But as for a President of the United States to use this as a political move, I would act just in the reverse, feeling that he waited this long to do something, and now -- that would just turn me off, to even consider voting for him.

ANDERSON: Well, most military fiascos, even the fiasco -- military crisis, international crisis, has always in the past caused a rallying around the President, a rallying around the flag.

VAN ATTA: To support him.

DONAHUE: We'll be back in just a moment.

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DONAHUE: This audience wants to know who you're going to vote for for President, Mr. Anderson.

ANDERSON: Oh, I think that if you get a contractor to fix the plumbing in your house, and afterwards there are a lot of leaks and the toilet doesn't work, you probably ought to get another contractor.

DONAHUE: Reagan? Does that mean Reagan?

[Applause]

DONAHUE: You'll vote for Ronald Reagan?

ANDERSON: I haven't decided yet.

DONAHUE: So, but you're not going to vote for the President.

ANDERSON: I don't see how I can. I don't think we should reward a poor performance.

DONAHUE: Is Anderson in the running for you, your namesake?

ANDERSON: Highly qualified. And he's not related. Highly qualified.

DONAHUE: So we don't know whether you're going to vote for Reagan or Anderson. Is that your point?

ANDERSON: No. I want to wait -- I want to wait a little longer. I want to listen to the debates.

DONAHUE: All right. With credits, then. We're out of time.

VAN ATTA: Phil, let me throw in an extra element here just for a second. I had the clear impression from these sources there would be a Daniel Ellsberg-like leak late in September if we did not go ahead on the story. There would be an anonymous mailing of documents, etcetera, to a newspaper. They felt that strongly about it. And that was -- that would be after we committed tremendous resources and manpower.